Editorial

Ophthalmology occupies an important position in the development of traditional Chinese medicine. Eye diseases were first recorded in oracles as early as the Shang Dynasty period (16th–11th century B.C.) and since then, various treatises on eye diseases marked the development of ophthalmic knowledge in the ensuing dynasty periods, including the first monograph of eye surgery published in the Song Dynasty (960–1279), and several encyclopediae on eye conditions written in the Ming (1368–1644) and Ching (1644–1911) periods.

Modern ophthalmology came to China from the West during the 19th century. The first stand-alone eye specialist hospital was founded in 1929 in Huaxi University in Chengdu, and in 1950, the first issue of the *Chinese Journal of Ophthalmology* was published, representing one of the few specialized scientific journals in China at the time. The Chinese Medical Association and Ophthalmology Branch was established as early as 1937, but because of wars and other causes, ophthalmic development was slow for several decades in mainland China. It was not until 1979, when China adopted the policy of reform and opening up, that the Chinese Medical Association began to actively organize domestic and international academic exchanges, promote scientific communications and diversify its interests into many specialty areas, and subspecialty study groups and organizations were subsequently formed. In recent decades, ophthalmology has progressed in mainland China in leaps and bounds in all fronts, from clinical to research and academic work, and from general ophthalmology to every clinical eye subspecialty.

China is a vast country spanning 9.6 million km², and ophthalmology development follows economic development in each locality. Likewise, the spectrum of eye diseases and prevalence rates of various eye conditions vary

greatly among different regions. With an increasing aging population, the prevalence of ocular fundus diseases affecting many patients in the occidental population has been observed to afflict more and more Chinese residents. Age-related macular degeneration and proliferative diabetic retinopathy are 2 outstanding examples which have been reported to show increasing trends. In the more developed and affluent parts of China, such as around Beijing, Shanghai and along the southeastern coast of China, ocular fundus diseases are the primary causes of low vision and blindness among elderly patients.

In the progress of organizing this special edition of *Ophthalmologica*, we have collected papers from research institutions and hospitals throughout mainland China with a primary purpose of presenting representative pieces of work which can offer our readers a bird's-eye view of the status of ophthalmic research and the concerns of ophthalmic investigators from that part of the world. As we can see from the 11 papers selected, which came from 6 different provinces, from Northern to Southern China, the emphasis of ophthalmic development is gradually shifting from treating blindness to preventing blindness, from clinical services and technique to clinical research and basic investigation. Such an evolution is perhaps, and to a certain degree, inspired by the recent rapid economic and social development in China and reflects the legacy of a rich cultural heritage of an ancient foundation of Chinese ophthalmology. It is our sincere hope that this collection of papers could draw wide attention to ophthalmic research in modern mainland China, and foster further communications and a cooperative spirit among investigators throughout the world.

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